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Helms, Aide Probed on Security Leak

Intelligence Panel Sought FBI Inquiry; Senator Denies Charge

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The FBI, at the request of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, is investigating "a potential violation" of national security secrets by either an aide to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) or the senator himself regarding U.S. intelligence-gathering capability in Chile, committee officials said yesterday.

A State Department spokesman quoted Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, as saying there was "no indication Helms was personally responsible for any breach of security, or even that he was aware of it, but that's why you investigate."

Two sources close to the probe said it has focused principally on Christopher Manion, Helms' aide on the Foreign Relations Committee. The sources added that Helms had not been ruled out as a suspect.

Helms heatedly denied the charge, telling reporters it was "a smear campaign" by the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency. He accused Abrams of "a deliberate falsehood" in sparking the probe. Manion, the brother of Daniel A. Manion, recently confirmed as a federal appeals court judge, could not be reached for comment last night.

In a formal statement, Sens. David R. Durenberger (R-Minn.) and Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.), respectively chairman and vice chairman of the intelligence committee, said the committee had "received information that there had been a potential violation" of the law that bars disclosure of classified information held by a senator or Senate employee or officer.

Abrams' spokesman said Abrams had "mentioned" the alleged security violation to Durenberger during "a chance encounter at a social event."

Without mentioning Helms or Chile, the statement said the committee had asked the Justice De-

partment to investigate and that the results would be turned over to the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. The Justice Department refused to comment.

An intelligence committee spokesman said the statement had been issued in response to a report in Sunday's New York Times about a probe involving Helms and Chile.

Sources close to the investigation said the alleged security leak involved a U.S. ability to monitor internal communications of the Chilean armed forces, through which officials had reportedly learned unreported details of the July 6 burning death of a Washington resident, Rodrigo Rojas, 19, in an antigovernment demonstration. Government troops have been accused of Rojas' murder.

The technology had also allowed unspecified contact with the growing opposition to President Augusto Pinochet within the Chilean armed forces, the sources said. The FBI began its inquiry July 18, the sources added.

Helms visited Chile and met with Pinochet the week after Rojas' death, taking along his wife and personal aides Deborah DeMoss, James Lucier and Clifford A. Kiracofe Jr. Manion, who was not on the trip, has traveled to Chile many times in the past. One staff member said the five-day visit was financed by the Chilean National Agriculture Society and not by U.S. taxpayers.

"None of us [on the trip], including the senator, had access to any classified information on Chile. There was no hearing, no briefing, no documents, no nothing. We had nothing to leak, period," the staff member said.

Helms made a surprise visit to the Senate press gallery yesterday to deny he had leaked anything to the Chileans. "It was Elliott Abrams" who started the probe, Helms said. "He crept up here in

the dead of night and made those charges . . . I am saying Elliott Abrams committed a deliberate falsehood, knowing it to be a lie."

Abrams' spokesman said Abrams had neither lied nor leaked anything to the news media.

Helms said the State Department and the CIA "want to silence me, they want to intimidate me, they want to harass me, and it's not going to work." He has long claimed that independent fact-finding missions by him and his staff have produced better information than diplomats or agents normally obtain, and that they feel threatened by his criticisms of their performance.

"Is it a smear campaign? Of course it is. If they can't beat you into the ground, they smear you into the ground," Helms said. "I don't know anything about any covert mission and Elliott Abrams knows that."

Intelligence sources said CIA Director William J. Casey had been angered by the reported security breach but did not want to clash directly with Helms by ordering his own investigation.

They said Secretary of State George P. Shultz had been "furious" when Helms praised Pinochet's government during his visit there and criticized U.S. Ambassador Harry G. Barnes Jr. for attending Rojas' funeral.

Abrams told a House subcommittee hearing that Helms' remarks were "indefensible" and said later that Helms was "completely isolated" in his defense of Pinochet. He had previously criticized Helms' charges that the governments of Mexico and Panama are involved in corruption and drug traffic.

Staff writers Mary Thornton and Patrick E. Tyler contributed to this report.